

PENTAGON DUBIOUS ON CUBA SUB BASE

It Says a Project by Soviet
Appears Less Likely Now
—Russia in New Denial.

By BENJAMIN WELLES

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 13—The Defense Department said today that new evidence from Cuba made it now appear less likely that the Soviet Union was planning to build a submarine base there.

Daniel Z. Henkin, Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, said that a Soviet submarine tender that arrived in the Cuban port of Cienfuegos Sept. 25 left Saturday and was moving away from the island.

However, he denied strongly that the Defense Department was backing away from intimations that the Soviet fleet was developing a permanent facility for missile submarines there.

In Moscow, official statements strongly reiterated the Soviet Union's denial that it was building such a base, termed United States suggestions "a concoction" and insisted that the 1962 agreement ending the Cuban missile crisis was being strictly adhered to.

Meanwhile, it was disclosed here that the extent of the construction being carried out by Cuban laborers for the Soviet Navy at Cienfuegos amounted to two single-story barracks—which a qualified source described as resembling in "chicken house"—plus a soccer

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field, a tennis court and an exercise area.

There are no Soviet naval personnel ashore, insofar as can be determined, qualified informants said, and the pace of construction appears to be leisurely.

In Washington today there were mounting indications that the White House and the State and Defense Departments were embarrassed by the publicity, which they helped stimulate last month and which—for the moment—did not seem to be borne out by the available information.

Robert J. McCloskey, the State Department spokesman, described the Tass statement as "positive." He declined to say whether the use of the term "positive" meant "truthful."

Mr. Henkin, under persistent questioning, stressed that the Defense Department, in reporting Soviet naval activity at Cienfuegos, had said from the start that it was not sure that a submarine base was being built. A denial that such a base was planned would not be "direct contradiction" of anything his department had said, he insisted.

Some officials and others

who have closely followed the situation here remained puzzled by the sequence of events nonetheless.

On Sept. 25 a White House official, briefing newsmen two days before President Nixon's trip to Europe, warned the Soviet Government against constructing "a submarine base" in the Caribbean.

"We are watching the deployment of Soviet naval activity and of possible construction there," said the official, who declined to be identified. "The Soviet Union can be under no doubt that we would view the establishment of a strategic base in the Caribbean with the utmost seriousness."

The official made available a speech by President Kennedy on Nov. 2, 1962—immediately after the Cuban missile crisis—stating that "if all offensive weapons are removed from Cuba and kept out of the hemisphere in the future under adequate verification and safeguards and Cuba is not used for the export of aggressive Communist purposes, there will be peace in the Caribbean."

Also on Sept. 25 Jerry W. Friedheim, a senior spokesman at the Pentagon, said that it had indications that the Rus-

sians wanted to establish "a permanent submarine facility" in Cuba. He implied that the information had come from flights of American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft.

Soviet Denial Reiterated

By JAMES F. CLARITY

Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, Oct. 13—The Soviet Union today issued its strongest denial to date that it was building a submarine base at Cienfuegos.

The denial came several hours before the United States Defense Department announced that a Soviet submarine tender had left the Cuban port. Soviet news media did not mention the ship's departure or its presence in Cuban waters.

Tass, the official press agency, said in an authoritative statement that American suggestions that such a base was being constructed were "a concoction." A separate Tass commentary, signed by Nikolai Chigir, said such assertions were a "hostile anti-Soviet campaign" that was "not only inspired but also encouraged by official representatives of the Pentagon and the White House."

The commentary did name a White House official, but it said that "neither U. S. Defense Secretary Melvin Laird nor anybody else could have any information on this base because there is no such base in existence and no construction work of this kind had been carried on or is under way."

Both the statement and the commentary said the Soviet Union was adhering to the agreement it reached with the United States in 1962 under which Russian missiles were removed from Cuba, easing a crisis between them.

Referring to the 1962 agreement, between President John F. Kennedy and Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev, Tass said, "Any assertions on 'a possible violation' by the Soviet Union of the above-mentioned understanding through the construction of a naval base on Cuba are a concoction, since the Soviet Union has not built and is not building its own military base on Cuba and is not doing anything that would contradict the understanding between the Governments of the U. S. S. R. and the United States."